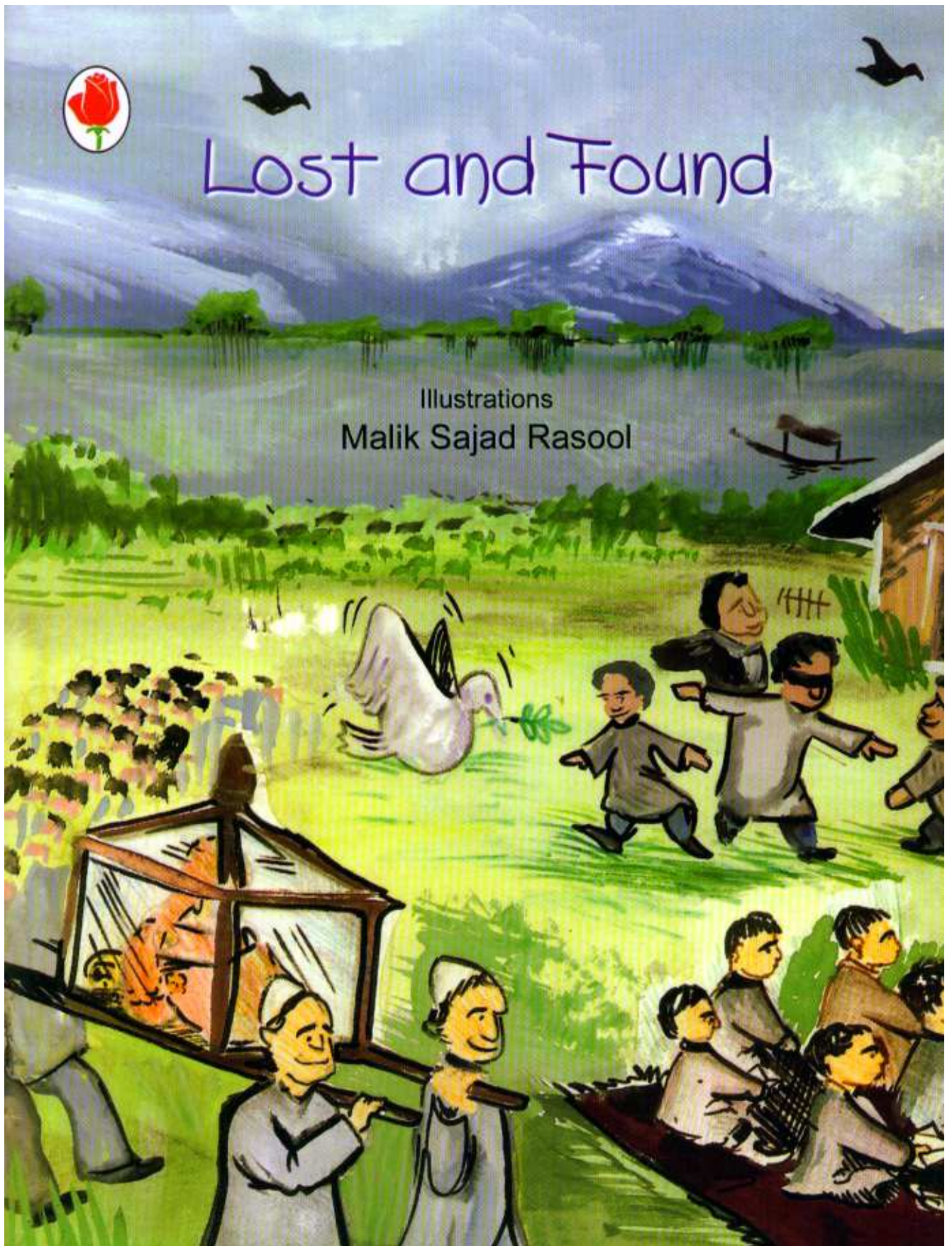




Lost and Found

Illustrations
Malik Sajad Rasool



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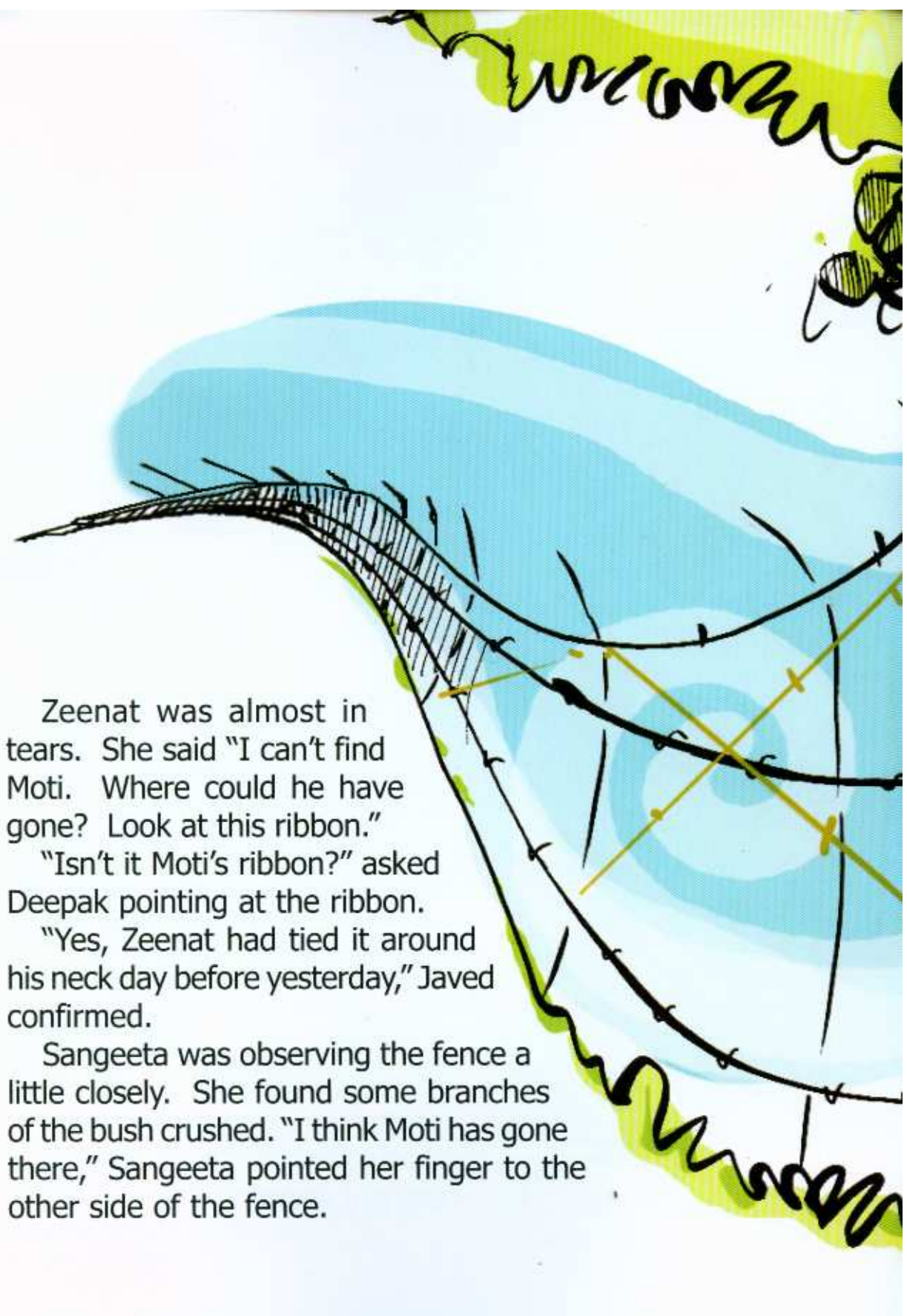


"Moti... Moti..." Zeenat was looking for her pet dog.

"Moti...come... see what I have brought for you," Zeenat called out loudly. She had a bowl of milk in her hand. But Moti was nowhere to be seen.

Suddenly, she spotted a piece of red ribbon. It was stuck in the fence of barbed wire. "Oh! This is Moti's ribbon!" Zeenat was worried. "Moti..." Zeenat shouted with all her might.

Hearing her shouts, Sangeeta, Deepak and Javed rushed to Zeenat. All the three asked in chorus, "What's the matter? Why are you shouting?"

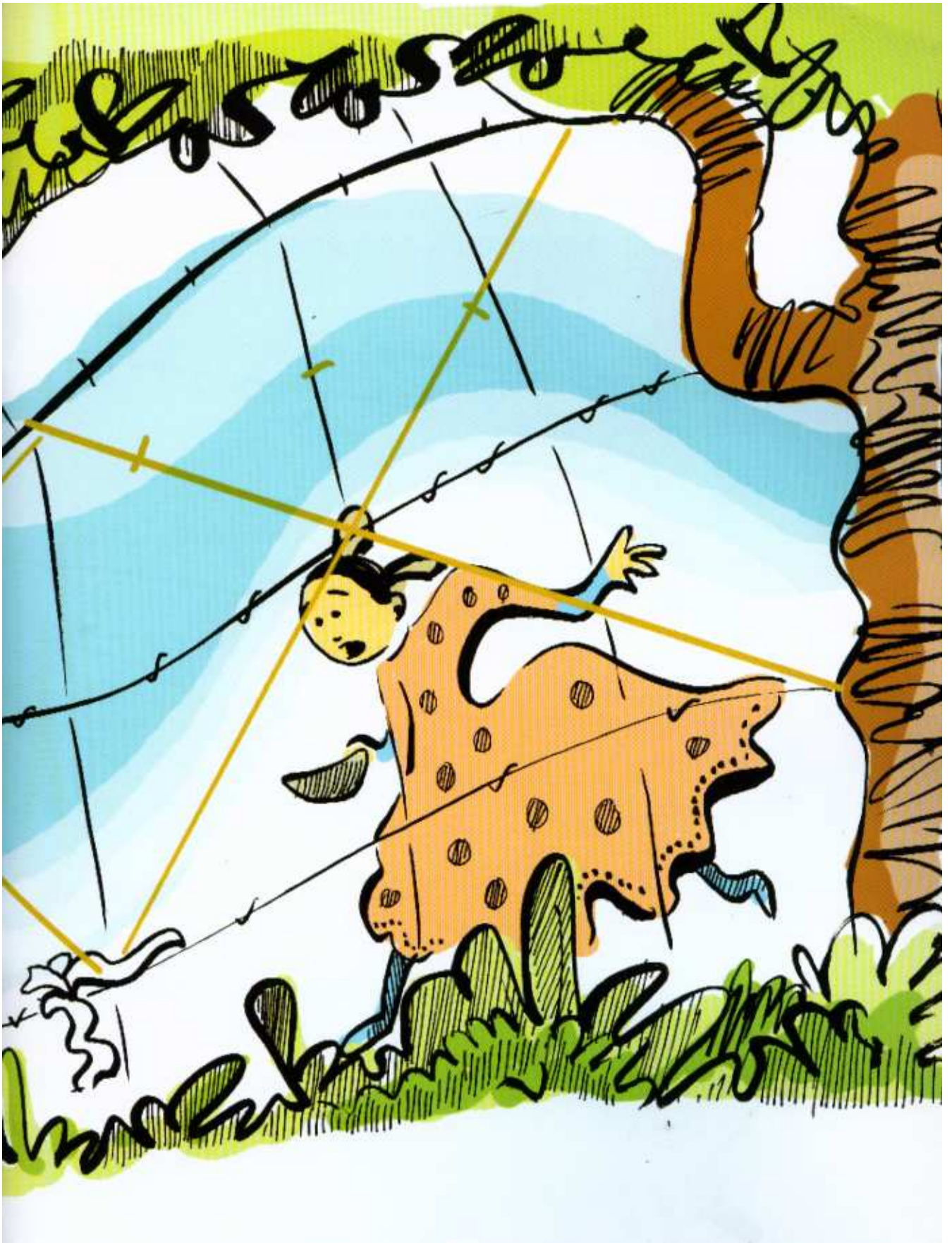


Zeenat was almost in tears. She said "I can't find Moti. Where could he have gone? Look at this ribbon."

"Isn't it Moti's ribbon?" asked Deepak pointing at the ribbon.

"Yes, Zeenat had tied it around his neck day before yesterday," Javed confirmed.

Sangeeta was observing the fence a little closely. She found some branches of the bush crushed. "I think Moti has gone there," Sangeeta pointed her finger to the other side of the fence.



"Oh! My Moti is lost..." Javed started crying.
Sangeeta hugged Javed and pacified him, "Don't cry, we'll find Moti. Come, let us go there."



Zeenaat still holding the bowl of milk in her hand made her way through the bushes. Sangeeta held the wire up so that no one gets hurt. One by one all of them went to the other side.

This side of the valley was also very beautiful. The same Himalaya Mountains were watching over the people of the



valley. The tall green trees were also similar, and the same water stream was flowing on both the sides of the fence.

Javed and Deepak both aged six grew up together like the children of the same family. Javed's elder sister Zeenat was eight, and Deepak's elder sister Sangeeta was ten years old. Sangeeta was respected as the wise person by all the three. She was also very protective of them all.

All the four were calling Moti one by one. But there was no response.

The children were sad and tired. They loved Moti like their own brother. Javed held on to Sangeeta's hand and said, "Didi... I hope we can find Moti." Tears rolled down his cheeks.

Seeing Javed crying Deepak said in choked voice, "I hope Moti is all right." Sangeeta being the eldest of all tried to pacify the boys, "I am sure he is somewhere here. We'll definitely find him."







"I am hungry," said Deepak.

"I am tired," said Javed.

Suddenly, they heard the sound of a bomb blast. They put their arms around each other. They had heard similar sounds earlier too. At home, in such a situation, their parents would take them indoors. Whenever there was firing or bomb blast the children were asked to stay in. But playful children would forget about those blasts and start playing outside next morning.

The place across the fence was deserted. Here they neither had the security of their home nor their parents. They got scared.

Zeenaat looked around. She saw a small tin-shed at a distance. She asked others, "Shall we go and sit there? We can take some rest and then again look for Moti."

All the four went inside the tin-shed and sat down. It seemed safer.

The night was approaching. Deepak held Sangeeta's hand and asked, "Didi, I am sleepy. I want to go home. Can we go now?"

Zeenaat put her arm around Deepak and said, "I don't think we can find our way back. It is so dark. Let us sleep here. We'll go home in the morning."

"Come, let us hold each other's arms and sleep," suggested Sangeeta.

It was dark and quiet. Nothing was heard except one's own breath and





the cries of jackals at times. Zeenat, Deepak, Javed and Sangeeta held each other closely. They were so tired that in a minute they were in a deep sleep.

On the other side of the border, there was panic in both Zeenat and Sangeeta's homes. The girls were missing along with their younger brothers. The parents could



neither eat nor sleep. They looked for their children all over, and returned home feeling hopeless and helpless. All of them were extremely worried.

Sangeeta's mother would just not stop crying, "Where are my precious children? Who has kidnapped them?"

Zeena's mother was also inconsolable. "I hope they are not killed." She said in the midst of sobs.

All sat together the whole night. They tried hard to console each other, "Don't cry. We'll look for them in the morning. We'll definitely find them."

Gradually darkness disappeared, and...

Kookru... koo...kookru...koo...

Sangeeta heard the wake-up call of the cock. She opened her eyes. The first thing she saw was their dear Moti happily sleeping on Javed's legs! And he had finished the milk!

Sangeeta smiled and shook Zeenat's shoulder, "Zeenat, look, look... Get up."

Deepak and Javed also woke up. They were overjoyed to find Moti with them! Moti too was happy to be with his family. He kept jumping over each one of them.



It was a beautiful morning. The sky was colourful. The snow-capped mountain tops glittered like gold.

The children and Moti came out of the tin-shed. They breathed fresh air. They were happy and felt victorious! And why not? They had found their dear Moti!



"We should now go back to our homes," said Zeenat.

"Yes, please hurry-up. Our parents must be waiting for us." Sangeeta added.

"Oh no! I don't want my *Abbu* (Father) to slap me again!" said Javed.

"And *Ma* will be so angry. She will not talk to me for two days," said Deepak.

"That will not happen. Our parents believe us. When we will tell them how Moti was lost they will be happy that we saved our dear Moti." Zeenat replied. "That's great!" said Deepak.



They all decided to tell the truth to their parents. Jumping with joy the children slipped into the village through the bushes.

The parents heard their voices and rushed out. They were relieved to see their children safe. After that, they were about to shower them with anger, but before they could say anything, the children started narrating the incident. On hearing, no



one scolded them. The children looked at each other and smiled.

Moti loved running around in the empty deserted land on the other side of the border. Now he knew from where he could cross the fence. He began to go there almost everyday! He would suddenly disappear and then reappear! For him, it was a great fun. The children also got used to Moti's sport.

One day, Javed's neighbour Adil saw Moti going to the other side through the bushes. He immediately shouted, "Stop him, Javed, stop him. That is enemy's side."

"What?" exclaimed Javed. He could not understand. "Can't you see the fencing of barbed wire? It is a border. This is our country and the land on the other side is enemy's country," Adil warned Deepak.

Javed could not understand Adil. "What is border? And what is enemy?" He said only one thing in reply, "Even I have been there. Look, nothing has happened to me! That place is as beautiful as our place here."

Feeling angry Adil went away.

Next day, Javed and Deepak were playing the game of horse riding on the branch of a tree. This tree was very close to the border. A little later, Adil also joined them. All of a sudden, they found two boys staring at them from the other side of the border. They were grazing a flock of sheep.

Javed asked them, "Do you want to ride a horse?" Both the boys were as if waiting for this invitation. They said, "Yes," and came in through the bushes. Adil protested but no one paid any attention to him.

Deepak asked the boys to sit on the branch and pushed it down. The branch had a lovely swing. They all felt as if they were on a horseback. Javed asked them their names. They were Shaukat and Sajad. Now, there were five boys enjoying the horse ride.

Adil was not happy about the new boys joining the game. He pushed Sajad down and pretended as if he had slipped while playing.

Sajad shrieked in pain. He was not able to get up. Deepak and Javed became anxious. "What can be done now?" Along with Shaukat, they tried to lift Sajad, but they could not. They asked Adil to give a hand. Very reluctantly Adil joined them. They pushed each other through the bushes, and reached Sajad's house on the other side of the fence.

Sajad's *Ammi* (Mother) was alone at home. She blessed the children for helping her son. When the children desired to leave she said, "You boys are so kind. God will always protect you. I have made some *halwa* (sweet). Do eat before you leave."

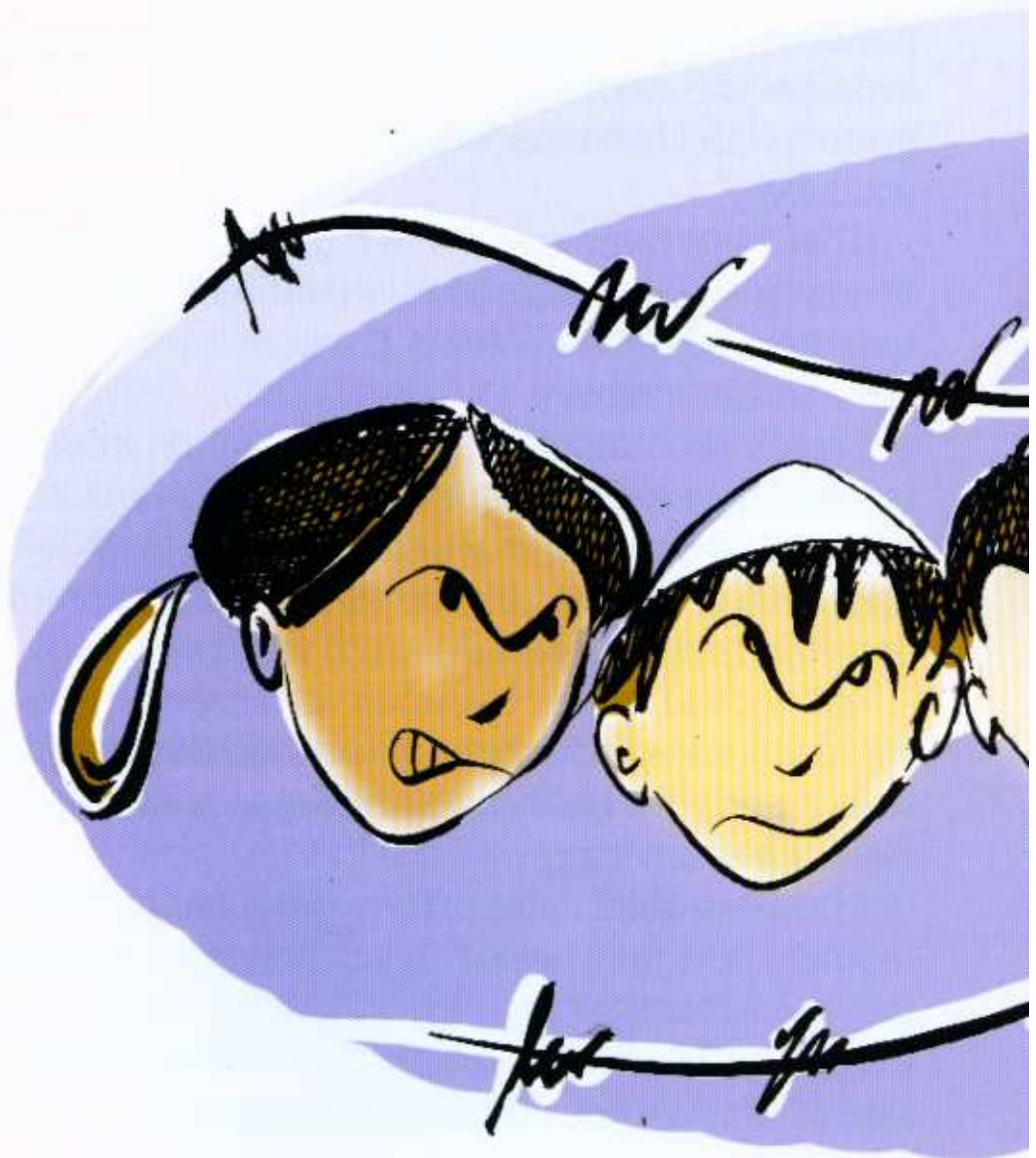
Then she came out with a big bowl of *halwa* in one hand and small bowls and spoons in the other. All the children sat together and relished *halwa*. It was delicious. Adil even asked for a second helping!

Sajad's *Ammi* applied some ointment on his leg and tied a bandage around. Deepak, Javed and Adil got up to leave. Shaukat walked with them up to a distance. All of them felt a beautiful bond with each other. Before parting Shaukat promised, "I will definitely come again to play with you. I like you."

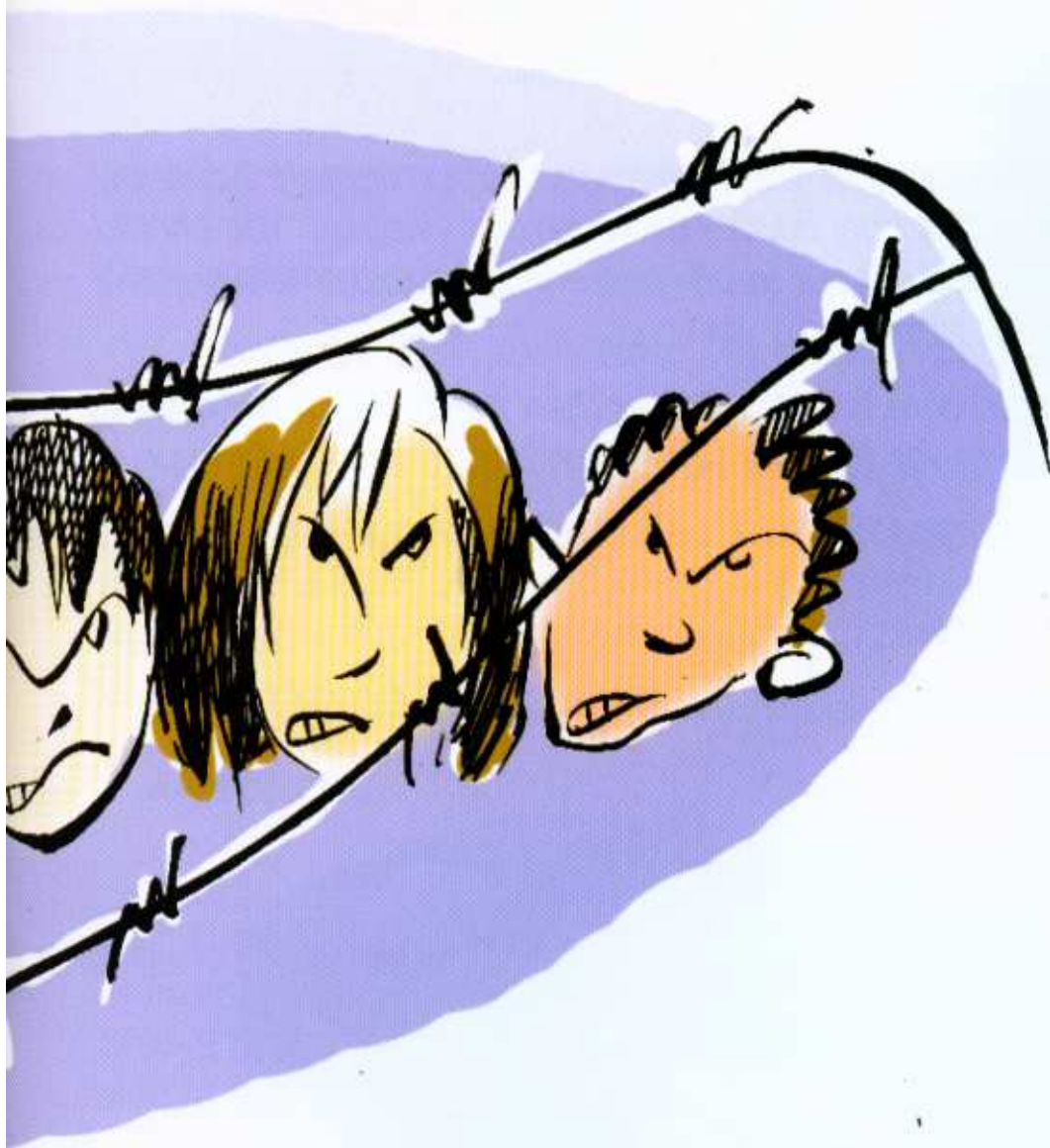
Adil looked softer than before. Having eaten the *halwa* served by Sajad's mother with so much love, he was perhaps feeling sorry for having pushed Sajad on the ground. But he did not say anything.

The boys went home. They were happy. They told their mothers how they helped Sajad, how they managed to cross the border and what a loving mother Sajad had, just like their own. Even the *halwa* tasted the same! Really, the other side of the fence is as beautiful as ours!

"There is no difference. Then why do we have this ugly barbed border?" asked Adil, Javed, Deepak, Sangeeta and Zeenat, all in one voice. "We want to break it!" The sound echoed all around.



Ten days later, Sajad knocked at Deepak's door. Deepak opened the door. He was surprised and happy to see that Sajad had no bandage on his leg. Sajad asked softly, "Do you remember me? I am that..."



"Of course I do. I'm happy that your leg is all right," said Deepak and hugged him. Sajad had brought a letter from his father. He handed it over and ran away.

Deepak's father opened the envelope. There was a beautiful drawing of flowers made by Sajad, a kind of "Thank You" note to his friends. And there was a letter for Deepak's father as well.

Dear brother,

I wanted to meet you in person. Unfortunately I cannot, because of this ugly border between our villages. You should be really proud of your good children. I feel extremely grateful to them for helping my son.

A barbed wire is not stronger than the bond of our hearts. I am waiting for the day when it will be removed forever.

I pray to God for the well-being of your family.

Your loving neighbour



And Deepak's father replied:



Dear brother,

I was touched by your letter. May God protect you and our loved ones.

Our children have only done their duty as fellow human beings. I fully agree with you that the hearts can't be divided by barbed wires. Let our children keep meeting and playing together, because they do not understand border.

We are praying for your good health and happiness.

Affectionately,

Your brother

From that day on the barbed wire could not stop the bond of love that had formed in the hearts of the families on either side of it.

JOINT PUBLICATION PROGRAMME OF BOOKS ON PEACE FOR CHILDREN IN ASIA

Children are the main sufferers from disasters arising out of conflicts and wars. To develop peace, love and harmony in children's innocent minds for their fellow beings without any discrimination through picture books, a project idea '**Listen to Me**' was initiated in 1998 and completed in 2010 by the joint efforts of experts from India, Pakistan, Nepal and Japan. It was organized by the International Center for Literacy and Culture (ICLC), Tokyo in Kathmandu, in collaboration with The Peace Stone Foundation (for Hiroshima) and The Japan Foundation.

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